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# AUTOREFERATY

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**PROBLEM OF LIMITS OF RATIONAL MODEL OF HUMAN  
ACTIONS. AN ATTEMPT TO CAPTURE HABITUAL-RATIONAL  
ACTION**

Summary of doctoral dissertation defended at the Institute of Philosophy, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, on October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2009; dissertation supervisor Prof. Krzysztof Brzechczyn.

Human actions are the basic subject of research in social sciences. Human practice, that is, the activity of making decisions, is one of the most important issues that social scientists are occupied with. Why has the person acted one way and not another? Has the person wanted to achieve an intended objective? If so, what objective? Why, acting in a given way, has the person used particular means, and not other ones? Questions can be multiplied but all of them have the same goal — the attempt to explain a particular action.

The concept of rational action is a predominant scientific trend in social sciences explaining human actions. Within the framework of the concept, actions of a given person are accounted for through knowledge, preferences (in terms of particular values) and the circumstances in which actions are taken. Generally, a person acts in a particular way — states the concept of rationality — to maximize their preference, that is, they consider reflectively a set of possible actions to be taken and choose the one that accomplishes their objectives to the largest extent.

The beginnings of the deliberations on the rationality of human actions date back to the ancient times. Aristotle wrote about instrumental reason thanks to which a person attains their objectives successfully. However, Max Weber was the one to start a broad discussion on rational action. He advanced a division of actions which also includes a characterization of rational action, that is, an action in which circumstances and means for the attainment of one's own ends are considered. There have been numerous explications and theoretical studies concerning the concept of rational action. It may be impossible to compile and discuss the entirety of the tradition of rationality of action, particularly in view of the fact that it is used by researchers in various scientific fields, for instance, in philosophy, sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, history and economics.

Apart from obvious advantages, the concept of rationality has some limitations as well. One of these seems to be fundamental. It has been pointed out many times that the concept of rationality presents practical human activity in a narrowed perspective. After all, there are other kinds of actions in the human world, apart from rational actions. For instance, there are the traditional, routine and habitual actions that are taken out of habit; affective actions, taken under the influence of emotions; imitative ones, resulting from copying other people's actions, etc. It can be claimed, therefore, that the analysis of human actions, according to the concept of rationality, leads to an inadequate description of an actual practice, as people do not act exclusively rationally, but in different ways as well.

Taking into consideration the limitations of the concept of rational action mentioned above, an interesting scientific problem seems to emerge; to determine the sources of limitations as well as to make an attempt to advance such a conceptualization of action which would not only encompass the rationally induced action but also other types of action. The very aim guided the author in the 'Problem of Limits of the Rational Model of Human Actions. An Attempt to Capture Habitual-Rational Action.'

Some notions of rationality in the studies of particular scholars (e.g. those of Carl R. Popper, John Watkin, Carl G. Hempel, J. Kmita and J. Nowak) have been analyzed in the work presented here. This enabled the author to state that there is an underlying assumption that limits the concept of rationality. The assumption may be formulated as *the rule of constant reflectiveness*. The rule states that a rational individual always considers alternative actions before taking a given action and chooses the most expedient one. The reflectiveness of an agent is a vital condition of rational action. Therefore, the adequacy of the concept of rationality should be limited to the situations in which *the rule of constant reflectiveness* is adhered to, that is, situations in which an agent actually considers various ways of conduct. However, such reflection does not always precede human actions. The revocation of the assumption of constant reflectiveness enables to list other actions, namely *unreflective* actions. These are, for instance, habitual and imitative actions. In his work, the author presents the concept of habitual-rational action in which two types of actions have been taken into account. Apart from a rational (reflective) action, habitual and imitative actions (both unreflective) have been presented. The characterization of the three types of action in one theoretical language permitted to outline the connections between these actions as the dependencies that explain when a given person acts in a habitual, rational and imitative way were determined.

The work 'Problem of Limits of Rational Model of Human Actions. An Attempt to Capture Habitual-Rational Action' should be ranked among studies on human rationality. Usually, three dimensions of rationality are distinguished: rationality of beliefs, actions and ontological rationality. Although the three dimensions merge to some extent, the author focuses exclusively on the second one, that is, actions. Thus, the issue of rationality of human beliefs and ontological rationality are not taken into consideration. Also, the issue of rationality of actions is narrowed. Only a formal (instrumental, methodological) understanding of rationality is adopted, namely, the one that analyses the consideration of effectiveness — the usefulness of means to given aims. Subject

rationality, that is, the issue of the assessment of particular aims of human actions in the light of some axiological criteria, is omitted.

The paper consists of three basic parts. In the chapter opening the first part, selected theories of rational action are presented. These are the concepts of rational action by Carl R. Popper, John Watkins and Carl G. Hempel. Moreover, the author presents the postulates of the rationality of action by Klemens Szaniawski, humanistic interpretation by Jerzy Kmita and its specifications presented by Wojciech Patryas, as well as the rule of rationality and its limitations in the form of the concept of non-evangelical model of a man by Leszek Nowak. The second chapter elaborates on the concepts that show the limited character of human rationality. In the main, these concepts include the deliberations on a traditional action by Max Weber, the concept of routine actions by Anthony Giddens and the concept of habit by Jean-Claude Kaufmann. The three concepts show unreflective actions that are a part of human activity and are taken on the basis of tradition, routine and habit. The chapter comprising a division of actions into reflective and unreflective closes the first part of the paper and poses a starting point for the following deliberations.

The second part of the paper is, in the light of the chosen aim, the most important and may be described as theoretical. It elaborates on the author's concept of human action in which, firstly, rational (reflective) actions as well as habitual (unreflective) and imitative (unreflective) ones are presented, and, secondly, transitions between these types of actions are drawn. And thus, in the second part's opening chapter, the author discusses the methodological assumptions of the paper, namely the theses of the idealizing theory of science. Idealization and specification constitute effective tools in the formulation of scientific theories. Generally, the starting point is the most idealized model in which the established set of the idealizing assumptions omits the factors recognized as secondary and leaves the main determinants of the phenomenon being studied. This allows the most underlying relation to be grasped. Then, such a model is specified in subsequent models by taking into account factors that have initially been omitted. The second chapter elaborates on a classification of actions that enables characterization of individual actions, which, besides social ones, are the object of further analyses. The concept of habitual-rational action requires defining certain terms concerning the subject of an action, means of action, their effectiveness, etc. One of those is associated with human needs. The introduction of this category involved the modification of the language of values which is usually applied in the models of rationality, for the sake of the

language of needs. The necessary terminological arrangements with regard to the conceptualizing apparatus are contained in the third chapter. In the fourth one, habitual action is presented and defined — that is, an unreflective type of human conduct that is not captured according to the rational model of action. The following chapters present three concepts of habitual-rational action in which individual human actions are encompassed. Model I, the most idealized one, covers habitual action exclusively. The established set of idealizing assumptions does permit to encompass other kinds of action. Model II, which is a specification of the initial model, enables description of habitual and rational action. Model III, on the other hand, which is yet another specification, makes it possible to capture habitual, rational and imitative action.

The third part of the dissertation which may be denoted as applicative, consists of three chapters. Here, the author presents an interpretation of certain concepts by selected scholars in the light of the notion of action as construed in the dissertation. The concepts are: the concept of “Being-in-the-world” by Martin Heidegger; the concept of the historical process by Jerzy Topolski, including the theory of the birth of capitalism in Europe; and the concept of an interpersonal individual by Witold Gombrowicz.

Consequently, within the conceptual framework of the habitual-rational action, it was possible to present certain ideas from “Being and Time” by Heidegger. The interpretation of the notion of *Being-in-the-world* indicates that Heidegger’s ontological deliberations include certain theses on the human activity of taking actions. The interpretation put forward by the author is an attempt to extract these theses and explain them in a more precise language than the one used in “Being and Time”. The interpretation of Jerzy Topolski’s deliberations enabled the author to detach non-uniform anthropological assumptions providing foundation to the concept of the birth of capitalism. It was possible since the concept is based on the model of rational action and the psychological theory of behavior, which hard to reconcile with the former. Bearing in mind the concept of habitual-rational action, the author also explains Gombrowicz’s duality of the determinants of human activity: the unreflective determinant associated with the society and the reflective one connected to an individual, conscious *I*. Furthermore, the author refines Gombrowicz’s idea showing that not only do people act in an unreflective way under the influence of the society, but also an individual may act unreflectively in an isolated situation — these being habitual actions.

The author interprets selected concepts of the three spiritual human domains — philosophy, social sciences and art — from the perspective of his

concept of habitual-rational action. It may serve as an argument justifying the search for not only the methodological unity of different fields of human intellectual activity, but also for the theoretical unity. A properly developed concept of habitual-rational action may become the basis for such a unity.